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Congresswoman Betty McCollum
Statement for the Record
Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act, H.R. 1913
April 29, 2009

Ms. McCollum: Madam Speaker, I rise today in strong support of the *Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act* (H.R. 1913). This bill makes a profound statement that this country will not tolerate violence motivated by bigotry and ignorance against its citizens. I commend Chairman Conyers for bringing this legislation to the floor.

The message of this bill is clear: the United States will not tolerate hate crimes. These crimes are unlike other violent acts of randomness. Targeting people because of their race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender or disability is a form of domestic terrorism. Such violent crimes send a chilling message to entire communities that they are not welcome and that intolerance and ignorance is alive and well.

Since 1991, the FBI has received more than 118,000 reports of hate crimes and we know that crimes of this nature are frequently underreported. Current federal law covers crimes committed based on a person's race, color, religion, or national origin. H.R. 1913 extends federal protection to include hate crimes committed because of a person's gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability. This bill allows the federal government to provide needed federal resources to state and local law enforcement officials to prosecute hate crimes and also authorizes grants to law enforcement agencies that have incurred expenses investigating and prosecuting hate crime cases.

Some opponents of H.R. 1913 have suggested that this bill legislates against thoughts and ideas. This is absolutely false. H.R. 1913 provides local authorities more effective means to prosecute *violent acts* of hate, not thoughts or speech. In fact, this bill explicitly includes First Amendment free speech protections for persons accused of acts of hate.

My first vote as a member of the Minnesota House of Representatives was for equal rights on housing and employment for the gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans-gendered (GLBT) community. As a Member of Congress, I have now voted for similar federal four times. The *Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act* must become law so that all Americans can fully participate in and enjoy the rights of a democratic society.

I urge my colleagues to support this legislation.